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A Strenuous Afternoon

A Short Scout Play
that any Troop can Enact

By E. RUSSELL PATERSON



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By

E. RUSSELL PATERSON



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A Strenuous Afternoon

CHARACTERS.

Scoutmaster,

Assistant Scoutmaster,

Three Patrol Leaders,

Scouts of Eagle, Buffalo and Wolf Patrols.

Farmer,

Tough (from city).

This play is set for a troop of three patrols. Slight changes will adapt it to a troop of any size.

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STAGE SETTING.

Camp Scene—Small table and camp chair facing stage entrance at opposite side of stage. One other camp chair at back of stage. Flag pole with flag raised.

The play can be produced with no setting other than a table and two chairs, in which case ceremony of saluting and lowering the flag at conclusion will be omitted.

COSTUMES.

Scoutmaster and Scouts in uniform.

Farmer, whiskers. Old, wide brim straw hat, leather boots, suitable clothing, including red bandana handkerchief. Old purse.

Tough. Old clothes with cap. Slovenly appearance.

Strenuous Afternoon

(Scout Master discovered sitting at small table writing busily.
Enter Assistant Scout Master.)

A. S. M. Hello, old man, you look busy.

S. M. Well, I am, rather. Making up report.

A. S. M. Don't you think this is too fine a day to waste on that kind of a job?

S. M. Yes, but you see we break camp tomorrow, and I want to hand in my report to the Local Council as soon as I get back to town. I intended to write it up day by day while we were here, but—well, you know how such things go. So many details to look after that you put off writing and keep putting it off until your two weeks is finished before you know it, and you find you haven't done more than jot down a very brief diary of what's happened. So I made a resolution to give the whole of this afternoon to the job.

A. S. M. Oh, I see. I just came over to find out if your fellows would like to join our troop in a game of flag raiding. Would you like to send them over?

S. M. Just as much obliged, but I guess not. Most of them have work they want to finish up before they leave camp, so I guess they'd better stay here.

A. S. M. Well, I wish you joy. So long.

S. M. So long.

(Exit Assistant Scout Master. Scout Master sets to work writing again. Soon looks up.)

S. M. Guess I'd better see what the patrols will do till supper.

(Rises and gives signal on his whistle for "Rally." All scouts of troop run in, salute him, and group around his table.)

S. M. You scouts will remember my announcement this morning that I have to spend the afternoon in writing up our report for the Local Council, and I want to know what each patrol is going to do until supper. First of all I want an Orderly to wait over there (pointing to stage entrance) and prevent any interruptions. Who'll volunteer?

(Several hands are raised. Scout Master points to scout who raised his first.)

S. M. All right, you were first. Now what are you patrols going to do? How about the Eagles?

PATROL LEADER OF EAGLE PATROL. We're going to finish our bridge over the stream.

S. M. All right. And you, Buffaloes?

PATROL LEADER OF BUFFALO PATROL. We have a lot of test work to finish up—sketch maps of the camp, and signalling, and things like that.

S. M. That'll be all right. And the Wolves?

PATROL LEADER OF WOLF PATROL. We're orderlies for supper, and we're going to give you a bang-up feed, so we won't have much time to spare. Most of us want to practice first aid for our first-class test.

S. M. That covers everyone. Now please remember that I don't want to be disturbed unless it's absolutely necessary. You, Orderly, wait over there, and please keep out everybody you can. Now clear out, all of you.

(Scouts salute and run off stage. Scout Master resumes writing.)

S. M. Now let's see. What did we do on Monday? Started sketch map work in the morning, and took a hike in the afternoon. (Writes busily.)

(Enter Orderly and salutes.)

S. M. Yes, what is it?

ORDERLY. There's a fellow out here wants to see you, sir. He's the chap we've noticed hanging around the camp for the last few days. Says he wants to see you specially.

S. M. All right. Bring him here.

(Exit Orderly, after saluting. Re-enters with boy dressed as tough from city, who shuffles across stage and pulls off cap.)

S. M. Do you want to see me?

TOUGH. Yah. How much does it cost tuh jine de scouts?

S. M. Why, it doesn't cost much—twenty-five cents to have your name officially enrolled. You don't have to buy a uniform if you don't care to. But if you get one it will cost from two to five dollars extra. Are you thinking of joining?

TOUGH. Dunno. I like de look o' de uniform. What-chuh gotta do tuh jine?

S. M. Why you have to learn a few things and do a little work. Then you take your tenderfoot test, and when you pass it you take your oath and then you're a tenderfoot scout. After that you can work at all sorts of different things, and get badges and honors—as many as you want.

TOUGH. Eh? D'yuh say work? I t'ought it wuz all play. Gee, if it's work, not fer mine! I gets 'nuff work in de city. I'm out here fer fun.

S. M. Well, you couldn't join our troop now, anyway, because we're going to leave for town tomorrow. But there are lots of other troops, and some of them must meet near where you live. You could join one of them when you get back. When I said work, I meant the kind that's fun, you know.

TOUGH. I ain't ever seen dat kind.

S. M. Well, perhaps you'd like to see it now. Orderly, get someone to show this fellow around the camp a bit, and let him watch the scouts working. (To Tough) Then you can come back and talk it over with me, if you like it, you know.

(Orderly salutes and exits with Tough, who still keeps mumbling about "Work dat's fun? Never heard o' dat," etc.)

S. M. There's Monday finished. Now Tuesday morning. Hmm. Let's see. Oh, yes, it rained that day, so we stayed under canvas and passed a lot of tests. And we had a bathing suit parade through the brush after dinner. (Writes busily again.)

(Very Small Scout runs in, stops abruptly in center of stage, comes stiffly to salute and remains at salute, while he flings out, all in one breath):

V. S. S. Please, sir, does north-northeast come between north and northeast or is it east-northeast or is that between east and northeast?

(Scout Master looks up and grins.)

S. M. I beg your pardon?

(Very Small Scout repeats same thing faster and louder than before.)

S. M. I really haven't time to think that through. Go and ask your patrol leader.

(Very Small Scout salutes and runs off, saying to himself, "North-northeast or east-northeast or north-northeast," etc.)

S. M. Wednesday morning, Wednesday morning. Land sports to work off all the surplus energy stored up during the rain. They were good, too. Game of follow the trail in the afternoon. (Continues writing.)

(Row occurs behind the scenes, boys talking loudly.)

Scout Master tries to work, but finds out he cannot.)

S. M. Orderly, Orderly!

(Enter Orderly, saluting.)

S. M. Send in whatever patrol leader is nearest.

(Orderly salutes again and exits. Patrol Leader enters and salutes.)

S. M. I asked you fellows to keep quiet so I could write this afternoon. I can't work while that row is going on.

P. L. Well, it wasn't me yelling. I was—

S. M. (Interrupting quickly) It doesn't matter whether it was you or not. Don't you know that you're responsible for seeing that the other scouts keep up to the mark? That's your job as patrol leader.

P. L. But it wasn't my patrol—

S. M. Even that doesn't make any difference. You're an officer, and therefore it's up to you to second all my orders. Now clear out and see that that noise stops quickly.

(Patrol Leader salutes and runs off. His whistle sounds behind the scenes and row stops suddenly. Scout Master nods his head as if satisfied and continues writing.)

(Injured Scout enters with a rush, from opposite side of stage, if possible, holding left wrist with right hand.)

I. S. Sir, I've hurt my wrist!

(Scout Master rises and examines wrist.)

S. M. Orderly!

(Orderly enters and salutes. Scout Master does not look around.)

S. M. Send me two scouts. Quick!

(Orderly salutes and exits.)

S. M. Sit down in the chair here.

(Injured Scout sits down while Scout Master continues examining wrist. Enter Patrol Leader and Scout at a run. They salute.)

S. M. Here's an injured wrist. Strained, I think.

(Injured Scout's head suddenly drops forward.)

S. M. Hello, he's fainted. Tip that chair back.

(Patrol Leader and Scout tip chair back until patient's head is near ground, steadying him meanwhile. He revives and they sit him upright again.)

S. M. Yes, I'm sure it's strained, and it's just the shock that made him faint. Bind up the wrist tightly, and put the arm in a sling.

(Patrol Leader and Scout take off their neckerchiefs, and use one to bandage wrist and the other to make a sling.)

S. M. Now make a chair carry and take him to his tent. Make him comfortable there, and bathe his wrist with cold water. If it pains too badly call me.

(Patrol Leader and Scout make chair carry, and take Injured Scout off stage. Scout Master sits down to writing again.)

S. M. Heigh-ho! I've got as far as last Saturday. Let's see. Morning—m-m. (Continues writing.)

(Very Small Scout runs in and salutes hurriedly.)

V. S. S. (All in a breath) Please, sir, is the Eighth Scout Law cheerful or thrifty?

S. M. What's that?

V. S. S. Is the Eighth Scout Law cheerful or thrifty?

S. M. Oh, I see. Eighth Law is "A Scout is cheerful."

V. S. S. Thank you, sir. (Turns to go off stage.)

S. M. I say, do you know what the Seventh Law is?

V. S. S. Yes, sir. "A Scout is obedient."

S. M. Yes, that's it. (Grinning) Orders were not to bother me, unless necessary. Understand?

V. S. S. Yes, sir.

(Very Small Scout salutes and runs off. Scout Master turns to writing again.)

(Noise is heard behind scenes. Orderly's voice—"But he's

very busy, and he can't see anyone unless it's very important." Man's voice—"Can't see me, eh? I guess he can. Come on, you young scamps," etc., as Farmer enters, pulling along two scouts by the ears. Orderly follows. Scout Master rises.)

FARMER. (Using whatever dialect is local) Heh, be you the boss here?

S. M. Yes, what can I do for you?

FARMER. Well, do these young good-fer-nothin' scalawags belong to you, eh?

S. M. Yes, I'm responsible for them just now. What's the matter?

FARMER. Well, what d'you mean by lettin' 'em run through my oats makin' a path six foot wide through the best part o' the field, an' spoilin' enough to—

ORDERLY. (Interrupting and bringing a chair from back of stage to Farmer) Will you have a chair sir?

(Orderly stands beside chair at salute. Farmer stares at him, releasing the other two scouts, who stand against back of stage side by side, rubbing their ears.)

FARMER. Why, thank you, bub. Think I will.

(Farmer sits down and Scout Master does the same. Exit Orderly. Farmer takes out bandanna handkerchief to mop face.)

FARMER. Well, them two young rascals wuz runnin' through my oats makin' tracks four foot wide or so, big 'nough fer a team of horses to pass down, an'—

(Farmer fumbles handkerchief, and drops it to ground. Before he can pick it up, one of the two scouts dives for it, and hands it to him politely with a salute. Farmer stares at him before he takes it.)

FARMER. Why, thank you, sonny. As I wuz sayin', I caught these young shavers of yourn fight in the middle o' my best oats with a path behind 'em two foot wide if 'twas an inch, an' I can't afford to lose money like that. Now why d'you let 'em run over the country makin' trouble fer people—

(Scout runs in with purse in his hand. Stops in front of Farmer and salutes.)

SCOUT. Is this your purse, sir? I found it on the ground just after you passed through the camp.

(Farmer takes purse and examines.)

FARMER. Well, by golly! If that ain't mine. An' there's a heap o' cash in it, too, more'n I usually carry round. (Takes out money.) Yes, there's the whole dollar an' thirty-five cents all right! I wouldn't like to lose all that money, no siree. Why thanks, sonny. That wuz a good find all right.

(Farmer starts to put purse in pocket, but hesitates, then opens it and takes out dime, which he holds out to Scout.)

FARMER. Here y'are sonny. That's fer findin' it fer me.

SCOUT. (Saluting) No, thank you, sir. Scouts don't take tips for their good turns. (Exits)

FARMER. (Looking after him open-mouthed, and still holding out the money) Well, I'll be—Don't take tips fer good—Why, that's the first boy I ever seen—(Turning to Scout Master) That's a good boy o' yourn, mister. But as I wuz sayin'. These young fellers wuz in my oats walkin' through 'em, an' some o' the oats wuz trampled down where they'd stepped. Now I don't mind havin' boys on my property, but they hadn't oughter swish through my oats, had they?

S. M. Were you fellows in this gentleman's oat field—on your honor?

BOTH SCOUTS. Yes, sir.

S. M. How far were you in the oats?

FIRST SCOUT. About ten paces.

SECOND SCOUT. About fifteen paces.

FIRST SCOUT. No, it was only ten because—

SECOND SCOUT. No, I'm sure it was fifteen because—

(Farmer stares at them.)

FARMER. Hey, you boys! Why don't you deny you wuz in my oats? No one seen you but me.

FIRST SCOUT. We're on our honor, sir.

FARMER. Well, I never! (To Scout Master.) Is all your boys young gentlemen?

S. M. (Smiling) We try to help them to be gentlemen.

FARMER. I never did see! Why why—I guess it don't

matter anyway. They didn't do no harm. Jes' a step'r two in the oats.

FIRST SCOUT. No, sir. We were in them quite ten paces!

SECOND SCOUT. No, it was fifteen, I'm sure!

FIRST SCOUT. (Explaining) We saw a bird fly out of the oats and we wanted to find its nest.

FARMER. What fer, to steal the eggs? Don't you know it's wrong.

FIRST SCOUT. No, sir, it wasn't to take the eggs. We don't do that. Just wanted to see the nest. We're sorry we spoiled the oats.

SECOND SCOUT. Yes, we're sorry, sir.

FARMER. Well, I never did see, on my life! (To Scout Master) It's nothin', sir, nothin' at'll. Jes' a few straws bent down. They'll straighten out again by mornin'. Oh, nothin', nothin' at all! Sorry to have troubled you.

(Farmer rises and shakes hands with Scout Master.)

S. M. I'm sorry, sir, if the boys have bothered you. We've tried to keep off the crops since we've been here.

FARMER. I'm sure you have, I'm sure you have. I wisht that young nevv'y o' mine from the city'd keep offen 'em too. Why don't he jine in with you now? I seen him in the camp as I come through.

S. M. Oh, that boy? Well, I shouldn't wonder if he'd join a troop when he gets back to the city. We'll see.

FARMER. I hope so, I hope so. Well, I must be goin'. Sorry to waste your time, sir. 'Twas nothin' at all, nothin' at all. (Turning to scouts.) Next time you boys comes nigh my place, jes' drop in an' have a drink o' milk. Maybe we can find some apples, too. Eh, what? Wuz a boy myself once on a time.

S. M. You might like to see our camp before you go. Sorry I can't show you around myself, but I'm busy just now. These scouts will take you about.

FARMER. Thank you, sir, thank you. Sorry to trouble you. (Exit Farmer with hands on shoulders of scouts, still muttering friendly good-byes. Scout Master sits down at his writing again.)

S. M. Such is Scouting. Now for last Tuesday. (Continues writing.)

(Tough enters excitedly, Orderly following.)

TOUGH. Say, mister, it's great! I seen it all, an' it's work dat's all fun fer fair!

S. M. What have you been watching?

TOUGH. Oh I seen dem wavin' little flags round deir heads, an' I t'ought dat wuz kids' play, but de guy dat wuz showin' me round begun readin' out letters. An' I asks him what he's readin', an' he says it's de letters dem kids is wavin' wid de flags. An' he explains it tuh me, an' jee, I'd like tuh be able tuh wave t'ings like dat!

(Tough pretends to expectorate on ground. Orderly jumps forward, but too late to stop him.)

ORDERLY. We don't do that in this camp. It isn't healthy.

(Tough wipes mouth with back of hand, and looks ashamed.)

S. M. Yes, that was signalling. It doesn't take long to learn it. What else did you see?

TOUGH. Oh, den dere wuz a gang dat wuz drawin' little t'ings on papers, an' it didn't look like nuttin' at all, but de guy he tells me it wuz de camp dey wuz drawin', just like's if yuh wuz lookin' down on it frum de sky, an' I seen dat wuz right, too, w'en yuh looked at it dat way.

(Tough starts to expectorate again, Orderly starts forward, and Tough remembers and checks himself in time. Repeats this at intervals through his speech.)

S. M. They were drawing sketch maps of the camp. That's something you have to do to get your first class badge.

TOUGH. Dat's firs' class work, all right. An' den dere wuz a gang tyin' each udder up wid hankichers, an' gee, dey looks funny! I starts to laugh at dem, but de guy he tells me dey're pretendin' dey're hurt, y'know—busted arms an' legs an' t'ings. An' anudder gang wuz finishin' off a bridge acrost a stream, all made out o' sticks an' ropes—de bridge, y'know, not de stream—but no nails ner iron ner nuttin' t'hold it togedder 'cept de ropes. An' I t'inks dat's easy, but dey let's me tie some o' de knots tuh try it, an' first'ing I knows dey's slippin'

all down de sticks. Dat ain't no cinch tyin' dem sticks to-gedder so dey'll stay put!

S. M. No, bridge building looks a bit hard—until you know how. But do you think you'd like to join a troop when you get back to the city?

TOUGH. (Emphatically) Yuh-bet-cher-neck!

S. M. Well, we'll see about that when we get there. In the meantime you can start learning some of the things you have to know before you can take your oath and become a real scout. (To Orderly) Take this chap out and get one of the scouts to start him on his tenderfoot work. And tell the supper orderlies we'll have a visitor tonight. (To Tough) You'll stay to supper with us, won't you?

TOUGH. Yuh betcher—I mean, t'anks, mister.

(Exit Orderly and Tough, latter walking behind Orderly, holding himself with stiff back, and trying to march military fashion. Scout Master continues writing.)

(Enter Very Small Scout in a rush, followed by Orderly, who chases him around stage, Very Small Scout calling out—)

V. S. S. Please, sir, how do you do the Fireman's Lift?

S. M. (Grinning) Here, Orderly, take this young pest out and keep him out!

(Orderly catches him, and starts to lead him off by the scruff of the neck.)

S. M. Or wait! He wanted to know how to do the Fireman's Lift. You might as well show him. Carry him out that way.

(Orderly lays him on floor, and carries him out with Lift.)

S. M. Well, I'm getting a few minutes to myself now and then. Thursday afternoon. Let me see. Paper chase. (Continues writing.)

(Enter Patrol Leader with scout. They salute.)

P. L. This chap has just passed his tenderfoot work with me, sir. You know we made a special arrangement to let him come out to camp with us if he passed his tenderfoot here. Can we give him his oath now, sir? There's just about time before supper.

S. M. (Aside) Might as well give up, I suppose. (To P. L.) All right call in the troop.

(Exit P. L. Whistles sound behind the scenes, and troop marches in and forms up for ceremony of taking Scout Oath. Oath is taken. Then flag is saluted and lowered. Bugle sounds supper calls behind scenes, and scouts are dismissed and run off in a hurry.)

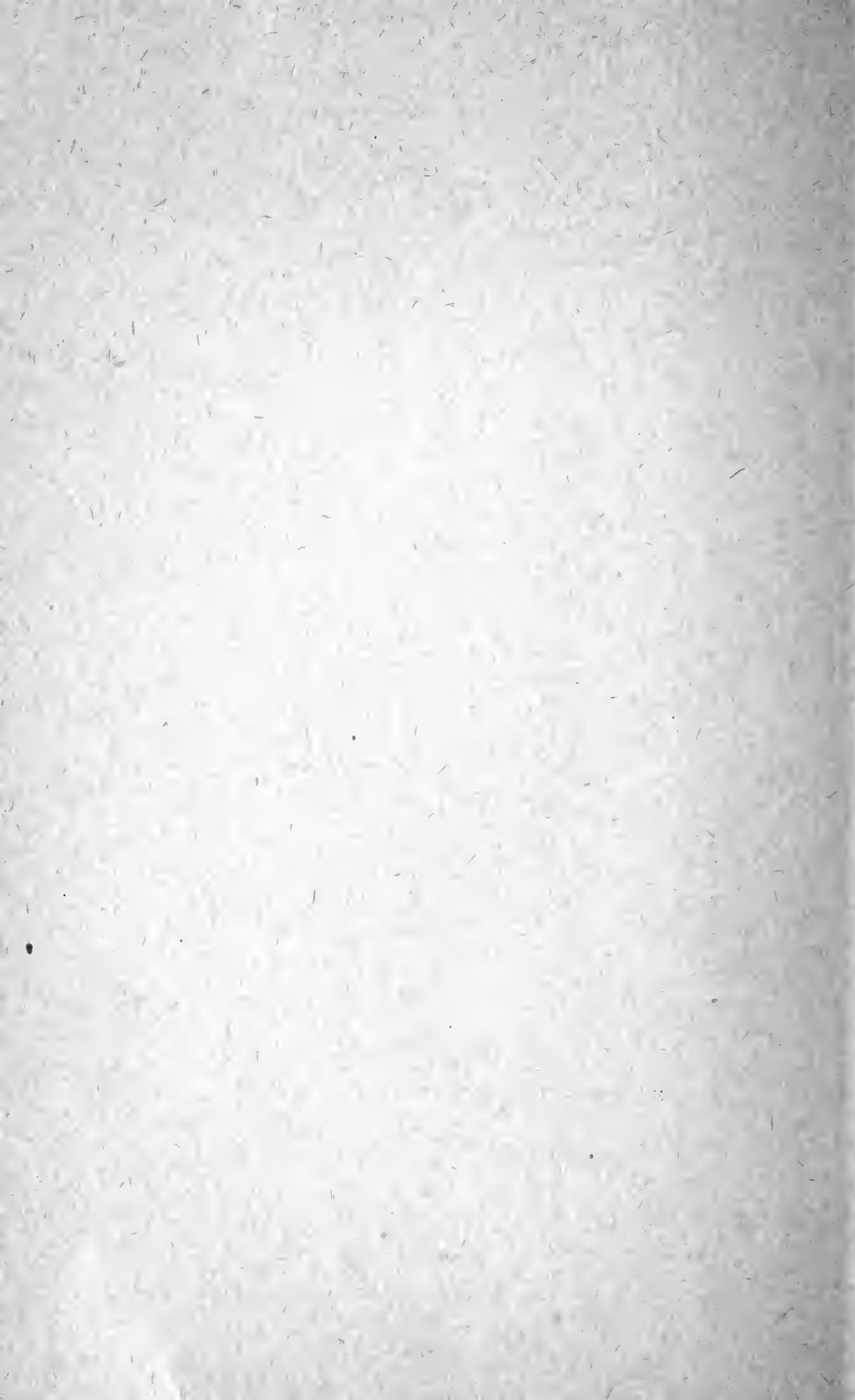
S. M. (Gathering up papers.) Well, old report you're pretty hashy, but I guess I can touch you up a bit later. Now for supper. That's what I call a strenuous afternoon.

(Exit S. M.)

(CURTAIN)

A STRENUOUS AFTERNOON

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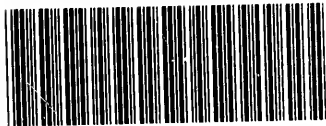
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